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SUBJECT: RUSSIA REACTS TO DAS BRYZA'S STATEMENTS

Classified By: CDA Daniel A. Russell. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Russian officials continue to respond sharply to public statements by DAS Bryza in Tbilisi and Sukhumi on responsibility for the increased tensions between Georgia and Abkhazia. On May 13, MFA Fourth CIS Department Deputy Director Dmitriy Tarabrin told us that the GOR was "surprised" that a senior U.S. government official would conflate "facts and false information." Tarabrin accused DAS Bryza of ignoring Georgia's on-going violations of the 1994 Moscow Agreement. Flying drones in a conflict zone on a spy mission was de-stabilizing and should be addressed before DAS Bryza "heaped accusations on Russia."

¶2. (C) Tarabrin maintained that Georgian drones continued to fly. Citing an Abkhaz report, he said that a drone capable of carrying air-to-air missiles was shot down on May 12 by the Abkhaz military. Accusing DAS Bryza of "blindly" siding with the Georgians, rather than acting as a "mediator" of the peace process, Tarabrin reiterated that Russia had explained its position clearly and regularly through all channels -- in Moscow, Washington and, Tbilisi. We reiterated that the U.S. was not alone in criticizing the series of Russian steps that have escalated tension in the region and cast doubt on Russian support for the territorial integrity of Georgia, with Tarabrin dismissive.

¶3. (C) Tarabrin's remarks follow a May 12 MFA statement, (A translation of the MFA statement was sent to EUR/RUS.) which accused DAS Bryza of siding with Georgia by acquiescing to the GOG's "one-sided" build-up of forces along the "border" with Abkhazia, the regular penetration of Abkhaz airspace by GOG spy planes, and its erroneous characterization of the increase in CIS peacekeepers. The MFA took issue with DAS Bryza's assessment that the UAV flights increased Georgian confidence. Arguing that Georgia's use of UAVs had violated the 1994 Moscow Agreement and UNSCR 1808, the MFA alleged that the drones were collecting intelligence and had been configured to carry air-to-air missiles. The MFA contended that Russia had informed Georgia and the U.S. of its initiatives in the region, and had clarified that the lifting of CIS sanctions was in response to the social-economic interests of the Abkhaz population, for which Georgia had done nothing in the last fifteen years. It judged talk of a potential military action by Russia as far-fetched. The statement concluded that DAS Bryza's remarks tracked with the "American policy" to defend those countries that they "strenuously" were pulling into NATO.

¶4. (U) Major Russian newspapers reported DAS Bryza's visit to Tbilisi and Sukhumi, focusing on his warning about Russia's "provocations" and his justification of Georgia's use of UAVs as a security measure against the possible military build-up in Abkhazia. RIA Novostey termed "counterproductive" DAS Bryza's alleged contention that many Russians would like to see tensions increased. The daily Kommersant interpreted DAS Bryza's emphasis on the importance of direct dialogue between Tbilisi and Sukhumi as a "hint that Russia would only interfere with the negotiation process."

15. (C) Meanwhile, Georgia's new Ambassador Erosi Kitsmareshvili has arrived in Moscow, and the MFA was working on a schedule of introductory meetings for him. Kitsmareshvili has an opportunity to urge a fresh start with the Medvedev team. While Russian rhetoric remains high, Tarabrin reconfirmed that the number of CIS peacekeeping troops has held at 2,500, under the 3,000 mandated limit.
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